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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002079

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SUBJECT: RULING PARTY'S ILLEGAL ACTIONS CAUSE CONFUSION AND VIOLENCE

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) SUMMARY: The crisis within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) widened after its leadership ignored an Abuja High Court order and organized non-elective congresses on October 15, which excluded non-Obasanjo loyalists and their supporters. The congresses were characterized by confusion and violence and raised the political temperature in Nigeria as PDP rivals play out their winner take all contest for the control of the party. END SUMMARY

2. (C) The current problem plaguing the ruling party is the continuation of the power struggle between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar for control of the PDP's party machinery. As the pre-election competition for the 2007 presidential election heats up, Abubakar has declared his candidacy, and apparently President Obasanjo privately opposes it. Although he currently is constitutionally ineligible to remain in office, President Obasanjo continues to act as if he is an incumbent candidate, leading to rampant speculation about the possibility of a third term.

3. (C) In addition, over the last two years President Obasanjo has methodically inserted his allies in key PDP executive positions, often contravening the party's constitution. In an earlier move to winnow out supporters of the Vice President, the party's executive decreed that all party members must re-register, in effect dissolving the current PDP. When the Vice President and his local supporters went to register in his home ward, they were all denied registration. According to an Obasanjo activist, working for the "Abacha 2 Project," as he described it, the PDP members in the district decided among themselves to disallow Atiku's registration. One week later Abubakar was allowed to register, but in his office, leaving the issue of registration of his local supporters unresolved.

4. (U) The latest controversy stems from the party leaders' decision to ignore an Abuja High Court ruling that mandated that the party must abide by its own constitution and hold elective congresses. According to the PDP's constitution, all congresses should freely elect office holders from party members. The PDP national executive, itself not empowered according to the party's constitution, directed that local party members, rather than voting for representatives of their choice, could only affirm pre-determined lists of candidates from the Abuja headquarters.

5. (U) PDP party members challenged this directive, saying it violated party rules. The Abuja High Court agreed and concluded that..."Going ahead with the non-elective congresses and convention will bring about anarchy and cause a breach of peace among its leaders. Party leaders should lead by example."

6. (U) Leadership of the PDP appealed the court order. But before the appeal could be heard, the party leadership organized non-elective congresses around the country in which the winners were all Obasanjo loyalists. The illegal move extended control of the president's faction to the local level.

7. (U) The resulting confusion and violence varied from state to state. Parallel congresses were held in Kwara, Edo, Adamawa and Oyo states, in which two slates of party office holders were elected, one loyal to Obasanjo, one not. Violence was reported in many states, including Ogun, Oyo, Delta and Rivers where at least 20 people died during the selections. Journalists were prevented from observing the process in Nassarawa State and the congresses were canceled in Bayelsa State. Several days later in Abuja, 100 busloads of women (about one thousand protesters) from Plateau and Nassarawa attempted to register their dissatisfaction at PDP national party headquarters. The police prevented the protest, though, and "deported" the women back to the state line.

18. (U) Ignoring the court order, a PDP party spokesmen denied that the congresses were rigged or illegal. President Obasanjo denied the congresses were fraudulent and challenged disgruntled party members to quit. This high stakes ultimatum leaves the President's rivals within the party little choice but to fight back, or leave the party they created.

19. (C) COMMENT: These events are the latest round in a high stakes game of political elimination in which President Obasanjo's faction of the PDP has demonstrated its willingness to use whatever means necessary, including violence and ignoring court rulings, in an effort to control the party and to exclude those it deems disloyal to the President's wishes. Thus, the blatant disregard for the rule of law in organizing and conducting the PDP's internal party congresses has set the precedent of confusion and violence for the other parties. If President Obasanjo and the PDP's leadership continues employing the same tactics, violence is almost certain to escalate. One possible consequence of this "scorched earth" policy is the continuing erosion of confidence in the political process as the Presidential faction of the ruling party willingly violates the law in order to implement President Obasanjo's will in 2007.  
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